that illegal cutting in forest areas and criminal activities of the Mafia gangs connected with it have increased in States like Bihar. The Forest Survey of India, in its report "State of Forests 1999", has reported a marginal decline in forest cover of only 2 sq.km since 1997 in the State of Bihar. This may be the result of a combination of factors, chiefly the biotic pressure on the forests. However, cases of illegal felling of trees are detected and action is taken by the State Government concerned under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and other relevant Acts and rules for the time being in force. In order to further consolidate the forest protection efforts, the Central Government has requested the State Governments to involve the local forest dwellers and people living in nearby villages in the protection, conservation and regeneration of forests, through the guidelines on Joint Forest Management issued to the State Government in February 2000 for protecting the forests through involvement of local people. The State Governments have also been requested by the Central Government to strengthen their forest protection machinery in order to deal with organised crime like smuggling and poaching in forest areas.

(c) and (d) Preliminary enquiry into the recent brutal killing of Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Divisional Forest Officer, Shahabad, Rohtas District indicates that the killing of Shri Sanjay Kumar was probably the handiwork of the local minning mafia. Regarding the Chhattisgarh case, there is no report with this Ministry regarding the alleged assault by police on 13 tribal women in Raipur District of Chhattisgarh. The report received from the State Government of Chhatisgarh is negative with regard to the incident involving thirteen tribal women.

Environment data

1375.SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned, "Government's environment data five years old" appearing in the Times of India dated 8th February, 2002;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to upgrade the environment data to prepare a road map to fight pollution; and

(d) the steps proposed to address to problems mentioned in the news-item?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) to (d) The Government has seen the news- item. The Committee on Environment and Health constituted by the Government recommended creation of integrated data base on environmental pollution and its impact on human health. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has constituted an Environmental Health Cell and also commissioned environmental health studies, to generate the data base on environmental pollution and human health.

Ganga Jal at Har-ki-Paudi

†1376. SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ganga Jal at Har-ki-Paudi in the pilgrim city of Hardwar, which is the symbol of crores of people's faith, is not even fit for Achman as per the latest data of Uttaranchal Regional Pollution Control Board;

(b) whether as per the studies made by that Board, consumption of even a handful of such water may cause jaundice, cholera and other serious abdominal diseases; and

(c) if so, the effective steps taken by Government to make pure Ganga Jal available to crores of devotees visiting the place from within the country and abroad, and the measures taken to get rid of this problem?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) As per Central Pollution Control Board's classification for river waters, the river Ganga at Hardwar is designated for bathing class quality only and not for 'Achman'. The latest data of Regional Office of Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board at Dehradun for the period from January, 2001 to January, 2002 as given below show that all the parameters except total coliforms in Ganga at Hardwar are within the prescribed limits for bathing purposes. The water quality standards for bacterial quality namely total coliform and fecal coliform have been revised and according to the revised standards, the total coliforms indicated in Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board Regional Office data are also within limits. The results of water quality monitoring programme under the Ganga Action Plan done separately also indicate that all parameters namely, Dissolved Oxygen, Biochemical Oxygen Demand and Total Coliform are within the prescribed limits.

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†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.